



Testimony in response to Proposed H.B. No. 5033:  
AN ACT ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF FOOD-INSECURE STUDENTS AT PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS OF  
HIGHER EDUCATION.

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I would like to thank the members of the Committee on Higher Education and Employment Advancement for the opportunity to testify today in support of HB 5033. The mission of the Rudd Center is to promote solutions to food insecurity, poor diet quality, and weight bias through research and policy. One of our areas of expertise is food insecurity, and more specifically, we have been studying food insecurity among college students over the past couple of years.

We strongly support this proposed act to address the needs of food insecure students at public institutions of higher education. I commend the committee in creating this very timely bill, as there is evidence from around the country that food insecurity among college students is a serious problem that the pandemic has made worse. As you can imagine, when a student doesn't have enough to eat, it is very difficult to succeed academically. Therefore, it is in the best interest of institutions of higher education to address this issue.

This bill is a welcome continuation of the work that we began two years ago in response to SA 19-25. To comply with that special act, UConn administered a survey in October 2019 to assess food insecurity on all five of our campuses: Storrs, Avery Point, Hartford, Waterbury, and Stamford, and reported back to the legislature in January 2020. The 2019 survey found that **one-third of all respondents reported low or very low food security** as measured by items from the USDA's standard assessment tool. This high number is notably higher than the statewide estimates of food insecurity in Connecticut, where the rates range from 12.8% in Tolland County to 17.0% in New London County based on a report from December 2020 by the Office of Legislative Research (1).

Students on the regional campuses reported substantially higher rates of food insecurity than students in Storrs. To better understand this, we conducted a second survey in 2021 focused only on the regional campus students. Again, we found that the rates of very low and low food security ranged from 25% in Hartford and Avery Point to 32% in Stamford and Waterbury. We also found significant racial/ethnic disparities; the rates of food insecurity for each group were: Latinx (38%); Black (35%); White (22%) and Asian (15%). **Statistically, Black and Latinx students were twice as likely to be food insecure as white and Asian students.**



We also found that students who are food insecure were more likely to report that they have missed class, missed assignments, and have considered dropping out. When we looked at their actual GPA using university records, we also found that they had lower GPAs. **Clearly, students struggling with food insecurity are also having more difficulty succeeding academically in college.**

We have one recommendation to strengthen this bill, which is that all Connecticut institutions of higher education should include the same set of validated questions based on the USDA's 18-item Food Insecurity Module. This is the tool used nationally and will allow the easiest comparisons over time and across schools. Schools should then be welcome to add additional questions to their surveys based on their unique student populations. As noted, we developed additional questions for our 2021 survey, and would be happy to share these publicly for other schools to consider.

## References

1. Food insecurity in Connecticut. A report by the Office of Legislative Research. December 18 2020. Jennifer Proto, Principal Analyst. Available at: <https://cga.ct.gov/2020/rpt/pdf/2020-R-0329.pdf>